

Strengthening Family Involvement in Millville Regional Safe Schools/Healthy Students Collaborative

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Program of Distinction Categories:

Leadership, Citizenship and Life Skills Categories

- Caring Relationships, Community Spirit

Youth in Governance Categories

- Youth & Adult Partnerships
- Community Engagement

Organizational Strategies Categories

- Partnership & Grants
- Volunteer Development

Sources of Funding: Funding for the "Strengthening Family Involvement in Schools" initiative began with the federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) Grant awarded to the Millville Regional SS/HS Collaborative. Goals and objectives regarding family involvement and out-of-school programs identified in the grant planning and implementation process by the Education Reform Element Committee and five other element committees were carried out using many funding sources. These included *No Child Left Behind* funding from the schools; PTO's and PTA's; 4-H Youth Development Program/Rutgers Cooperative Research & Extension; Parent-to-Parent Program; and local businesses and sponsors. Additional resources are added regularly.

Knowledge and Research Base

More than ever, today's schools are serving children from dysfunctional homes, children living in poverty, children of teenage parents, special education students and children being raised by grandparents or older siblings. As reported in national surveys of school order and safety, crime, violence and disorder in schools have become major issues in the United States. These problems not only endanger students and teachers, but they also prevent teachers from teaching and students from learning.

Family support and involvement is one of the key factors that help children succeed in school. Research indicates that family involvement in schools increases student achievement (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Ballen & Moles, 1994; Epstein, 1995). Family involvement is considered so important that the *No Child Left Behind Act* requires that schools develop formal programs to increase family involvement.

Parental involvement is critical in facilitating children's development and achievement and in preventing and remedying educational and developmental problems (Scannella, 2005). Researchers have found that when programs are designed to involve parents fully, students achieved more regardless of socio-economic status, ethnic origins, racial backgrounds, or their parents' level of education. In fact, with full parental involvement, disadvantaged children achieve at the same levels as middle-class children.

Substantial evidence exists to show that children whose parents are involved in their schooling have significantly increased academic achievement and cognitive development. Family involvement also has positive effects on children's behavior in school, attitudes about school and work, scores on standardized tests, and attendance (Epstein, 1991). According to Machen, Wilson, and Notar (2005), improving parental involvement can better schools. Parental involvement is vital for developing higher educational standards within schools, and engaging parents in an active role in the school curriculum can open alternative opportunities for children. The best educational results occurred when schools and families collaborate. The role of parents is strengthened when they meaningfully participate in their children's educational achievements.

Needs Assessment

A needs assessment was conducted as part of our collaborative application for the federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant awarded by the United States Departments of Education, Health and Health Services and Justice. Data was obtained from a variety of resources including Kids Count, New Jersey Human Services Update, School Violence & Vandalism Reports, New Jersey Department of Education School Report Card, crime statistics from local law enforcement departments, and the United States Census. The needs identified demonstrated an overwhelming number of academic, social and emotional risk factors. A major component of these risk factors is a lack of family involvement in the schools. By addressing family involvement, we anticipated improved safety, reduced alcohol, drug, and violence issues, increased academic achievement, and more services to meet the mental health needs of our students. In preparation for the "Strengthening Family Involvement in Children's Learning" training, information was gathered from teachers, parents, administrators, Communities in Schools coordinators, social workers, and students to determine the needs with regard to family involvement for their specific school and community. This information was used to customize the training session to the participants and assist schools in preparing their plan of action.

Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives of the Millville Regional Safe Schools/Healthy Students Collaborative are:

Goal 1 – Combine present interventions and promising programs with innovative evidence based resources into a comprehensive community-wide strategy for creating safe and healthy schools where all children can learn and develop into healthy adults.

Objective 1.1 – Institute educational reform that includes high standards for all students in an environment conducive to learning.

Objective 1.2 - Support talented, trained, and dedicated classroom teachers through professional development and resources for innovative classroom techniques.

Objective 1.3 - Expand out-of-school learning opportunities.

Objective 1.4 – Implement alternatives to typical disciplinary actions, including interventions for positive behavior.

Goal 2 – Institute an infrastructure that will sustain the integrated services and partnerships and serve as a model for future programs.

Objective 2.1 – Integrate resources derived from partners to develop a comprehensive and integrated approach that is strong and enduring.

Objective 2.2 – Increase knowledge for communities, researchers and practitioners on creative approaches being employed by schools and communities to address school-related issues.

In order to address these goals and objectives, the SS/HS Education Reform Committee identified two major areas of focus: out-of-school programs and increasing family involvement in schools. As a result, a “train the trainer” workshop titled “Strengthening Family Involvement in Children’s Learning” was conducted in January 2004. The objectives of this workshop, conducted by the 4-H program, were to:

- Develop an understanding of the importance of family involvement
- Develop an understanding of the types of family involvement
- Explore ways to encourage family involvement
- Provide an opportunity to share experiences, ideas, and programs
- Review/discuss the parental involvement policy for an individual school
- Plan methods to involve families and the community in a school
- Develop a Family Involvement School Plan of Action

The trainer and the Communities in Schools coordinators worked with local schools to develop and implement their Family Involvement Plan of Actions.

Target Audience:

The target audiences for the Millville Regional Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) Collaborative are the rural communities of Maurice River Township, Commercial Township, Lawrence Township and City of Millville located in Cumberland County and Woodbine Borough located in Cape May County, New Jersey. Each municipality has a different demographic picture. A variety of services and programs are offered to all students Pre-K–12 and their families through the SS/HS Collaborative.

The target audiences for the “Strengthening Family Involvement in Children’s Learning” training were individuals affiliated with each of the 16 schools involved in the Millville Regional Safe Schools/Healthy Students Collaborative. Each school was encouraged to send a team of 5-10 individuals including principals, teachers, guidance counselors, Communities in Schools (CIS) coordinators, school management team chairs, family liaisons, parents, Whole School Reform facilitators, social workers, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) presidents, and community partners.

Program Design and Content

Type of Program

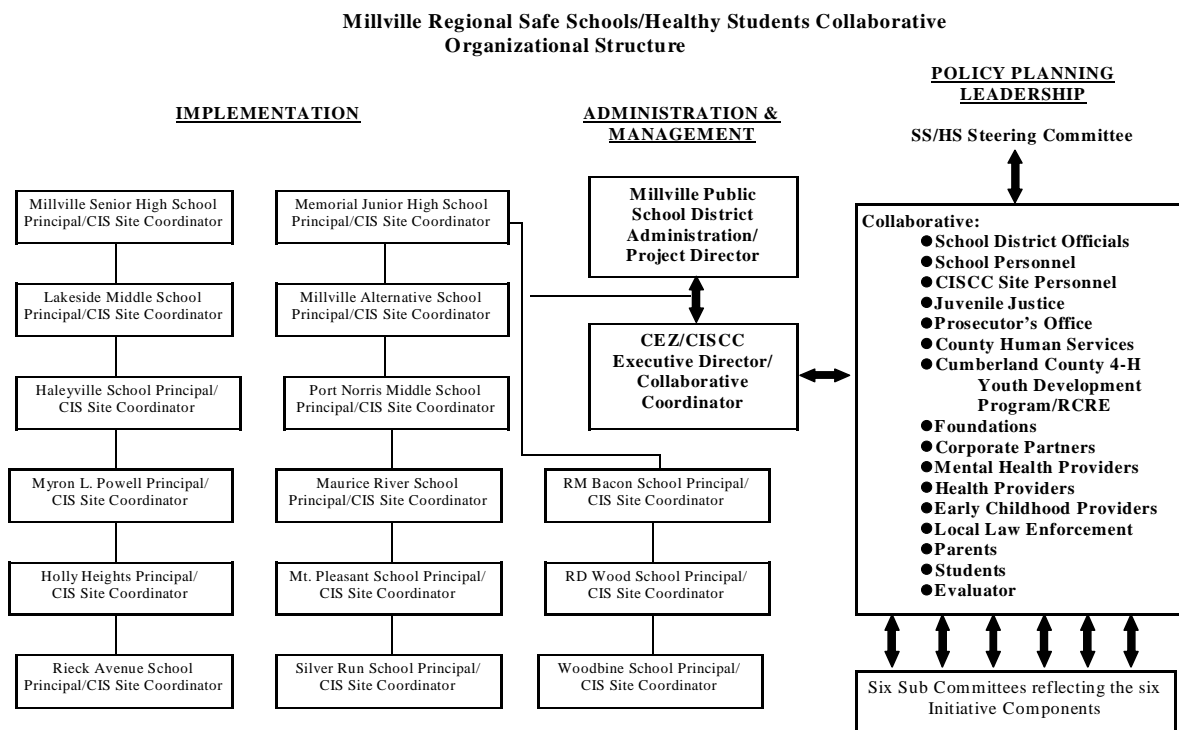
The Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative is a discretionary grant program supported by the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Health Services, and Justice, which provides students, schools, and communities with federal funding to implement an enhanced, coordinated, comprehensive plan of activities, programs and services that focus on promoting healthy childhood development and preventing violence and alcohol and other drug abuse.

The Millville Regional Safe Schools/Healthy Students Collaborative project uses Community and School coordinators (CIS) in 16 schools and 5 school districts to create safe and healthy schools in which children can learn and develop into healthy adults. Some of the programs that are implemented in the project include Second Step, Character Counts, ACTNOW and Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (*See attached Millville Regional Safe Schools/Healthy Students Collaborative Organizational Structure Chart*).

▪ Overview of the "Strengthening Family Involvement in Schools" Initiative

We started focusing on this initiative by developing and conducting a workshop on *Strengthening Family Involvement in Children's Learning*. This was followed up by an action plan developed by each of the 16 schools and supported by the county 4-H agent and the Education Reform Committee for implementation. Where identified and needed, additional funds and support was located. The training session provided an overview on the importance and types of family involvement; ways to encourage family involvement and how to prepare a family involvement plan of action for your school. Some of the other topics discussed in the workshop included the value of family involvement in helping children to succeed, the forms of family involvement, how schools can encourage family involvement through the development of policies and procedures, fostering communication, and supporting staff interactions.

Organizational Structure Chart



Methods Used to Deliver the Program

A three hour workshop developed and conducted by the county 4-H agent titled "Supporting Family Involvement in Children's Learning" provided an overview of the importance and types of family involvement; ways to encourage family involvement and how to prepare a family involvement plan of action for one's own school. Three of these workshops were held in January 2004. The initial delivery method was group training. This led to facilitation of the development of action plans in each of the schools. On-going support is given to individual schools as well as to the collaborative as a whole. Support is given through individual counseling and group facilitation.

Curricula and/or Educational Materials

Several educational materials were used to support the initiative of the SS/HS Education Reform Committee and Steering/Administration Committee to strengthen and increase family involvement in schools. The CYFAR *Supporting Family Involvement in Children's Learning Best Practices for Non-formal Educational Settings* Training Model developed by Maureen T. Mulroy, Ph.D., Extension Specialist, School of Family Studies, University of Connecticut, Joan Bothell and information from the Partnership Center for the Social Organization of Schools (Joyce Epstein) were used.

Other educational materials used to support the Strengthening Family Involvement in Schools Initiative were:

- Building Communities with Strong Families* (1998), Iowa State University Extension
- Strengthening Families Program* (2001), Iowa State University Extension
- Off to a Good Start: A Kindergarten Readiness Program* (2002), University of California Cooperative Extension
- Family Memory Book & User's Guide* (2003), Rutgers Cooperative Extension
- CYFARNet Web Site*, Children, Youth & Families At-Risk Initiative, United States Department of Agriculture

4-H staff assisted in the development and implementation of several family programs held at different schools. These evening and Saturday programs consisted of hands-on activities for children and their parents. 4-H Cooperative Curriculum System materials and other 4-H curriculum were used for these programs. The follow-up to the initial trainings held in January 2004 is what makes this program unique. It was not a one-time training, but an on-going resource and support mechanism to make a change in each school's community and to increase parent/family participation.

Partnerships or Collaborations

The Millville Regional Safe Schools/Healthy Students Collaborative is comprised of 16 individual school buildings for students Pre-K through 12th grade. The schools are part of five municipalities and school districts. The partnership also includes law enforcement, mental health providers, social service agencies, faith organizations, communities and students. The Cumberland County 4-H Youth Development Program of Rutgers Cooperative Research & Extension has been an active partner

in the Millville Regional SS/HS Collaboration since its inception. The county 4-H agent serves as chair of the Education Reform Element Committee and is a member of the Steering/Administration Committee.

For further information about the Millville Regional Safe Schools, Healthy Students Collaborative, visit the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative website at <http://www.sshs.samhsa.gov>.

Program Evaluation

Process

Following the "Strengthening Family Involvement in Children's Learning" training, an end-of program evaluation was completed by all participants. The SS/HS Educational Reform Element Committee reviewed the evaluation results before the next steps were begun. A follow-up questionnaire was sent to each school approximately six months after the training to determine if progress was made on their school plan of action. Monthly, the Educational Reform Element Committee reviews the updates of progress made in each school and/or collaborative wide.

Outcomes and Impacts

In response to the question on the end-of-program evaluation, "Has your commitment to family involvement changed as a result of this training?" 48% of the participants indicated that they were more committed. There was a 9% increase in what the participants knew before the training and what they knew after the training with regard to the role that family involvement plays in a child's success in school. Sixty-seven percent of the workshop participants indicated that they "knew a lot about ways to encourage family involvement at my school" as compared to 26% who indicated that they "knew a lot about this topic prior to the training". On the six-month follow-up survey, 95% of the workshop participants indicated that the information presented in the training session was valuable. One participant stated "the training called my attention to the need to develop a parent involvement policy." As a result of the training, one school established a Parent Involvement Committee and this committee was very active during the year.

Rowan University is the evaluator for the Millville Regional SS/HS Collaborative federal grant. They have collected data to demonstrate an increase in out-of-school programs (from 233 programs to 314 programs for a 135% increase in programming); an increase in parental programs (104 programs to 147 programs); and an increase in parental/family participation (6,829 parents per year to 11,444 parents per year). The positive role of parent involvement for student achievement has long been recognized in professional literature. Efforts at building higher levels of parental involvement in the schools have resulted in a substantial increase in parent participation in school programs. (*See Chart 1*).

Chart 1
Parent Involvement
2002/03-2003/04 School Year

School	Programs Offered 2002/03	Number of Parents Attending 2002/03	Programs Offered 2003/04	Number of Parents Attending 2003/04
Millville Senior High	3	350	3	350
Millville Memorial High	8	1800	9	2400
Alternative School	No Data Available	No Data Available	2 ¹	19
Lakeside Middle School	12	100	20	200
Silver Run School	7	235	12	775
Holly Heights School	No Data Available	No Data Available	13	1043
Mount Pleasant School	14	60 ²	18	43 ²
Rieck Avenue School	16	1652	14 ⁴	1364
Bacon School	12	500	13	600
Wood School	16	325	20	350
Child Family Center	5	825	6	1540
Woodbine Elementary	0	110	1	153
Maurice River School	3	110	5	160
Haleyville-Mauricetown	3	199	8	1332
Port Norris	3	213	10	550
Myron Powell (Lawrence Twp.)	2	350	7	565 ³
Totals	104	6829	161	11444

Notes:

1. Parent involvement activities limited to back to school night and parent volunteer program.
2. Data confirming attendance was only available for one event in 2002/03 and two events in 2003/04.
3. These data are estimates from data that did not break out parents from students in cases where programs included participation by both parents and students.
4. Job action by teachers caused some program cancellation.

Communication to Stakeholders

This information has been shared with the schools and the federal government. A video on the Millville Regional SS/HS Collaborative was developed to promote the impact of the programs and services provided as well as the benefits of the partners involved in the SS/HS Collaborative. This video has been aired on a local television station and was shown to over 200 community members at local churches, chambers of commerce, service clubs, organizations, and parent-teacher association meetings. We are in the process of completing steps in a communication plan that will address getting the successes of the Millville Regional SS/HS Collaborative experience out to the community as a whole.

Program Sustainability

Sustainability is always a challenge. The parent/family involvement programs should remain in place. Now that the schools are trained, they have parent support groups in place and are seeing the difference the programs make; they will be able to reallocate *No Child Left Behind Funds* to continue the programs. Increasing out-of-school programming is more difficult to sustain. It requires a lot of funding. Through the collaboration we are applying for additional grants but need to do more training with school staff on how to sustain programs by developing a plan with the participants to sustain the groups themselves.

Replication

The Strengthening Family Involvement in Millville Regional Safe Schools/Healthy Students Collaborative initiative can be replicated in any community across the nation that is ready to bring schools and communities together to focus on strengthening educational efforts and family involvement in schools. Each school needs to invest a few hours of training as well as follow-up meetings with school teams to improve the family involvement in their schools.

Rationale and Importance of Program

The changing educational climate has created an imperative need for schools to identify tools, strategies, and model programs that enhance the safety and success of all children and the professionals who serve them. Because young people are legally required to attend school, school personnel have a corresponding duty to provide children with a safe, secure and peaceful environment in which to learn.

The opportunity for 4-H and Cooperative Extension to be part of a collaborative partnership to implement the Safe Schools/Healthy Students federal grant in 16 schools is invaluable. The Millville Regional Safe Schools/Healthy Students Collaborative has provided an opportunity for the Cumberland County, NJ 4-H professional and staff to be involved in the development and implementation of after-school programs and out of school clubs as well as assist in providing curriculum and resources to support educational efforts. In addition, 4-H has been recognized as a valuable resource for research-based curriculum and experiential based learning opportunities for youth.

Strengthening Family Involvement in Children's Learning is important to families, schools, and the 4-H Youth Development Program. To make the Strengthening Family Involvement in Schools Initiative more successful, we have to provide the follow-up support to make the action plans happen. Without this vital piece, the training would have been...a nice one-day workshop.

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